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Screwtape's Millennial Toast

Louis A. Markos
Houston Baptist University

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Cover Page Footnote

Keynote Address

INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume V

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Fifth
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2006

Upland, Indiana

Screwtape's Millennial Toast

Louis A. Markos

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Screwtape's Millennial Toast

Louis A. Markos

(The date is December 31, 2000; the place is a posh hotel conference room in an upper-income region of hell. The League of Senior Tempters has gathered to toast in the new millennium and they have invited as their guest speaker a legendary tempter and trainer of young devils: Screwtape. After the usual formalities, Screwtape begins his address:)

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you tonight. For forty years now I have been engaged in a massive project that has demanded unprecedented cooperation between the various branches of the Ministry of Temptation and that has consumed untold resources and devil-hours. Even our Father Below has taken an active role in what has proven to be our greatest undertaking since the Crusades. What, you may be asking yourselves, is this new scourge of which I speak? Another World War perhaps, a second Enlightenment, a renewed attempt to fool the humans into thinking they can build utopia? For shame, gentledevils. Do you think we in hell have completely lost our imagination? Don't believe those lies of the Enemy that say we in hell can only pervert and destroy. Even now we have succeeded in stealing from the Enemy what he has long claimed to be his prerogative alone: the creation of a new species of man. Ah yes, laugh if you will, but we have done it, done it so well that the humans have yet to recognize this new species rising up in their midst. Why do you look so dumbfounded, my fellow tempters? Have you too been fooled? Allow me then to rip the veil from your eyes that you may know this species and learn how best to tempt it. Let us explore together the habits, rituals, and unique life-cycle of the American teenager.

For some time, I must admit, I was frightened. It looked as if post-war prosperity in America would play right into the Enemy's hands. Think of it: millions of young Americans freed from back-breaking toil, allowed the time and opportunity to nurture their imagination and their fledgling sense of wonder. Imagine, if you can stomach it, an army of boys and

girls reading those horrid plays and novels and poems that the enemy so loves. Picture them dialoguing as equals with these dead scribblers (please, Liposuk, if you're going to be sick, do leave the room) and, horror of horrors, adding their own unique contributions to the cesspool of human creativity. Just think how the Enemy could have used those desires to direct all those impressionable young scholars to himself. Yes, my gentledevils, for several years the situation looked grim indeed.

But do not worry; we rallied immediately and met the danger head-on. We knew we could do nothing to eliminate their new-found leisure time, so we shifted our tactics. Instead of trying to foment a new outbreak of child-labor (ah, the good old days; how I loved to watch those little porkers sweat), we simply filled up their leisure with an endless flow of mindless and mind-numbing trash.

As most of you are well aware, the Clamor & Bedlam section of hell has long been trying to find new ways to drown out that awful music of the spheres that the Enemy has been assaulting our ears with for the last ten thousand years. And if that were not torture enough, the Enemy insists on producing new human composers every generation to echo those celestial harmonies on earth. If I have to hear that "Air on the G String" one more time, I think I will rip out my own ears! Selfish tyrant that he is, he even stole from us the common herd. Into their dull, pathetic lives, he brought folk music and opera and brass bands. He gave them musical shows and sickening waltzes and those blasted tunes of Gershwin, Porter, and Rodgers that I still can't beat out of my brain.

Yes, the struggle has been a difficult one, but we have finally prevailed. For five hundred years the forges of hell huffed and groaned, until, but a mere 50 years ago, they spat out their greatest invention: an infernal machine with the power to demolish every melody the Enemy ever conceived. The humans call it an electric guitar, but we in hell call it by its real name: the Din-maker. True, a few tricky humans have succeeded in

coaxing occasional moments of joy from the Din-maker, but they are few and far between. Fueled by our success with the Din-maker, we next took their drums, which the Enemy had given them to help keep time, and turned them into, of all things, melodic instruments. My fellow tempters, you simply *must* listen to what the humans now call Rap, Hip-Hop, and Heavy Metal; our own C & B band would be hard-pressed to produce music of such undiluted ugliness and cacophony. It's simply wonderful; no human could possibly harbor an intelligent or passionate or spiritual thought while listening to the stuff. But there's more! Over the last century, even those beloved composers of the Enemy have begun to embrace this same hell-born ugliness and cacophony; they call it atonal music, but we in hell call *it* too by its real name: Noise. Lovely, lovely Noise. Tearing down every higher spiritual thought the humans ever had, disconnecting them from all celestial harmony, perverting that most terrible gift of the Enemy (the sense of beauty). How foolish the Enemy was to make such a firm link between Truth and Beauty. Did he not know we would first demolish Beauty, and then leave Truth to atrophy?

I can see by your faces that many of you think I have digressed, but I have not. I told you a moment ago that our new strategy for distracting the American youth from any form of intellectual or spiritual growth was to fill his leisure time with trash. Well, gentledevils, the degradation of their popular music (not to mention the barbaric and grotesque dancing that accompanies it) has been for many years now our first line of defense. You simply cannot imagine how much of their time and energy the American youth (from here on in I shall call him by his species name: teenager) pours into Rap, Heavy Metal, and its many derivatives. Those delicious humans have even invented (without our help, mind you) a machine that allows the teenager to strap his music to his ears and carry it with him wherever he goes. It has proven an absolute boon in ensuring that the teen suffer no interruption from an unending stream of noise. Believe me, my fellow tempters, there is no more effective way to block messages from the Enemy; one might as well try to discern a whisper in the midst of a pack of braying donkeys.

In many cases, the music has spurred the teens on to violence. This, of course, is a good thing and very helpful to our cause, but don't be led astray by these random outbreaks. The real purpose of the music is to make them numb, to incapacitate them for real human feeling and fellowship. We gave it to them not that they might have fun (emptiness not happiness is what we seek), but so that they might become desensitized to that terrible beauty, wonder, and mystery that the Enemy has spread so liberally amongst them. That accursed Creator! He can use the smallest flower, the most pathetic animal to grab a hold of their hearts and draw them upwards to his presence. It pains me to admit it, but the Enemy has even converted some of

them to his cause through musicians who play our own infernal music on our own drums and Din-makers. How, how can we fight an Enemy who can use anything, simply anything as a means to recruit humans? You'll no doubt remember that time when the Enemy used a donkey to trick one of our own prophets. It's simply disgusting, and decidedly unfair.

Still, we mustn't despair. The music has been far more effective for our cause than his. Even those that he *does* win to his side can usually be held in a state of spiritual torpor by heavy doses of the music. And besides, it has so many other uses! Not only does it isolate and divide them from their parents and teachers; it severs them from history and from reality itself. The concerts are a truly beautiful thing (how I've enjoyed the deafening noise, the bestial gyrations, the loss of individual dignity), but beware that camaraderie does not break out. Your focus must remain firmly on using the music to provide the teen with an illusionary, masturbational world safe from adult supervision. In this area, I would suggest heavy use of what has proven to be the crown of our Teenage Corruption Project (TCP): the music video. If you think Rap and Heavy Metal are effective soul-crushers, wait till you see what happens when the music is wedded to a kaleidoscope of violent and sexual images that flash on the retina at dizzying speed! Let the Enemy try his best; I defy him to work his redemptive magic on these wonderful products of the infernal imagination.

But wait, the usefulness of the music does not stop here. The in-bred tendency on the part of young people to model themselves after heroes and leaders has generally worked in the Enemy's favor, but not anymore. The modern teenager actually idolizes the creators of this music; indeed, they often follow them like sheep, ascribing to them the respect and authority once reserved for their own fathers. Focus your best efforts on the rock star, and, along with him, you will drag in a whole pack of adoring fans. And believe me, my fellow tempters, this is not a hard task. Their heavy use of drugs, their belief in the absolute goodness and sanctity of their own self-expression, and their generally warped appetites and desires make these teen idols prime candidates for demonic control.

But a word of warning. Once you have roped in the rock star and you watch the teens begin to gather around him, you must make sure to whisper into each of their ears that their idolatry of the musician is an expression of their own individual choices and tastes rather than what it truly is: a herd instinct. Encourage them to think (and believe) that while their church-going friends are all dreary copies of one another, they are unique, special, an elite corps of free individuals who have risen above the common mass of humanity. By no means let them see that they and all their fellow fans look and dress and act exactly alike. Remember, self-deception is our greatest tool for separating them from the will and the grace of the Enemy. The more

they efface their true identity, the more you must convince them that they have freed themselves from all bourgeois standards and restrictions. The more they surrender their will to us, the more you must puff them up with a belief in their own triumphant will-to-power.

Here, of course, Nietzsche is most helpful. (Ah, Nietzsche, Nietzsche, how fondly I remember *that* soul; even as I devoured it, it kept denying my existence.) Fill your teen charges to the brim with Nietzsche's argument that all religion is a slave ethic and that they must move themselves beyond middle-class notions of good and evil. But, whatever you do, do not allow them to read Nietzsche himself. Their understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy must lead always to a simple, mindless nihilism: to a belief that everything is relative and that there are no objective moral or theological absolutes. Remember, though Nietzsche is one of our greatest allies, there are still in his works dangerous ideas. Nietzsche has an annoying habit of uncovering hypocrisies that we would rather keep hidden and of inspiring a kind of individual growth and maturity that poses a major threat to our overall plan for the modern world. And that plan is simply this: to fashion a lowest-common-denominator world where all true creativity is crushed and any attempt to rise about mediocrity is attacked as elitist and undemocratic.

In my last public address (before devoting my full time to the Teenage Corruption Project), I advised the young devils of the Tempter's Training College to foster at all costs a diabolical version of the democratic ethos. I dubbed that diabolic ethos "the spirit of I'm as good as you," and, if I may so pride myself on my prophetic powers, you will note that nearly every public educational initiative in America has helped realize our goal of producing a mass of young people who know nothing of their tradition or heritage but live trapped in a contemporary box of ideas from which most are unable to escape. Oh, what a joy it is to watch young minds be stifled in the name of political correctness or multiculturalism or all those other wonderful euphemisms the humans come up with to justify their rabid envy of true intelligence and creativity. If they were really allowed to read and enjoy Plato or Augustine or Dante the teens would see through most of our temptations with ease; but never fear, this rarely happens in the modern America we have helped to create. When any of these dangerous ideas do sneak through, we simply drown them out with the music, or, in those that cannot be so distracted, we insert in their minds a feeling of superiority over the tradition they barely understand.

Or, there is another way, one that I am particularly fond of and that I (yes, I) helped to develop. One day, while devouring the soul of Picasso, it struck me that the best defense against the various dangers posed by a knowledge of the tradition was a strong offense. Let me explain. Behind those "great" books that the Enemy so loves is not only an attempt to discern Truth but a

reaching after and a celebration of Beauty (as I suggested a moment ago, the Enemy foolishly linked these concepts not only in his universe but in the souls of the humans he created). What better way to head off any appreciation of or desire for Beauty, I thought, than to produce in the teen population a craving after ugliness. Impossible, you say! On the contrary, it is *very* possible. Indeed, it has been done. Throughout America (and Europe as well), girls whose physical beauty might have been used to celebrate the glory of the Creator have purposely and self-consciously "uglified" themselves. They shave off their hair or dye it with grotesque colors. They wear clothes that are drab, colorless, and formless. Even better, they (along with their male counterparts) pierce their bodies in a hundred different places. Not since the Gnostics of the early church have I seen such hatred of the physical body, such disgust for the human form (both in its masculinity and femininity). They live, by their own choice, in a world of ugliness; their music, their art, their literature, even their language reinforce their degraded view of humanity and (the real goal, here) themselves.

At this point, most of you may be asking yourselves how we have prevented the adult population from leading their teens out of this lowest-common-denominator world. Gentledevils, that is the best news of all! Since time began, young people have learned and grown by imitating the behavior and culture of their parents and other elders in the community. But today, through much labor and toil, we have succeeded in reversing this process. Though it seems impossible to believe, in America today the adults often pattern themselves after their own teenage children. When their teens play music that is physically painful to the ears, the adults do not attempt to instill in them a higher aesthetic taste or challenge their notion of what is beautiful. Rather, they wonder within themselves why *they* are unable to "understand" this music and endeavor to conform themselves to the tastes and lifestyles of their progeny. What long, wonderful hours of laughter I have had watching the pathetic attempts of grown men and women to adapt themselves to teen culture (now how's that for an infernal oxymoron!). Indeed, whereas most popular entertainment in America used to be directed at a mature audience, nearly all such entertainment has been degraded to the level of pubescent and even pre-pubescent children. Of course, this was part of our plan as well. We made sure to equip the American teen with an almost endless supply of excess cash, thus ensuring that every marketer and advertiser in the country would target them. With each passing year, their civilization, if I may coin a new word, becomes more and more "adolescentized." No longer are the arts made to embody lasting values or to rise above the prejudices of a given time and place; rather, they concentrate on short-lived shock value meant either to numb or to titillate, but by no means to inspire deep thought and contemplation of higher truths.

Mediocrity is the rule, but it is a mediocrity that carries with it an urgency. It must be possessed *now*, no matter the cost.

For you see, teenagers, no matter the level and intensity of their rebellion against society, are first and foremost consumers. If they ever once question or doubt their role as consumer be sure to whisper in their ear that it is only “fair” that they immediately have everything that their parents have. Make sure, of course, that the thought never once strikes them that their parents did not have these things until they were well into their 30’s or even 40’s. Give them a lust for stuff on demand, and make them feel that it is their due, their inalienable right. And once you’ve established such impulsive behavior, let this too trickle upward to their parents. Let their parents feel that they too must have the newest cars, the fastest computers, the latest gadgets. Let them feel that without such things they are inadequate, perhaps even bad parents. Let discontent flow down like a mighty river, until all feelings of thankfulness have been eradicated. (By the way, did you notice how we’ve taught most of their media people to refer to Thanksgiving as Turkey Day?) And if you really want to have fun with the teenagers, convince them to despise all bourgeois standards as mean and hypocritical while simultaneously impelling them to purchase the most expensive stereo equipment available (paid for, of course, by their parent’s credit card). Even more fun, teach them to upbraid their parents for being destroyers of the environment while hiding from them the glaring fact that theirs is the most disposable, fast-food, throw-away generation in history.

Such is the modern teenager, and, wonder of wonders, the Americans have so taken him to their hearts that they have packaged him, marketed him, and now export him to every country of the world. How it fills me with joy to watch the nations of the world ignorantly imitate every bad habit of America (I mean bad by the Enemy’s standards, of course) while resisting those very virtues that we have long sought to stifle. The seed we planted in America has indeed born fruit; the world is quickly being united not (as the deluded politicians think) by real respect for the dignity of man, but by infernal music videos, adolescent Hollywood films, and a lust for unrestrained consumerism.

My fellow tempters, I wish that I could end my speech here with a claim of absolute victory, but alas, the modern teenager has within him certain unique qualities that the Enemy has often used to pull him out of our grasp. It pains me to enumerate these qualities, but enumerate them I must that you might be forewarned and forearmed.

First, and foremost, the teens (curse them) are remarkably tolerant of differences and are generally willing to give people a second chance. Don’t believe the incendiary propaganda we disseminate through their fear-mongering politicians: racism, sexism, and

prejudice in general are not particularly strong in the modern teen. He tends to accept others as they are and to allow them to express themselves as they see fit. This is not a good thing, but it can be channeled for our purposes. What you must be careful to do is to convince the teen that tolerance is the be-all and end-all of virtue. In this, the public schools have proven to be our willing accomplices. Let the teen view tolerance as an absolute good in the name of which any crime or immorality can be justified. The way to accomplish this is to separate tolerance from any concept of the innate dignity of man or of his shared fallen creatureliness, and attach it instead to a weak-kneed relativism best summed up by the phrase, “I like vanilla; you like chocolate.” Let tolerance manifest itself not as a desire to lift up all men to a higher standard of dignity and morality but as yet another slogan for creating that lowest-common-denominator world which (as I told you earlier) is our real vision for modern America.

I said a moment ago that sexism is all but extinct among the modern teenager, though we have succeeded in fanning some residual misogyny through the efforts of our corps of rap artists (my, my, another oxymoron!). Still, among the more dangerous qualities of the teen (and of his society in general) is his willingness to allow real equality to girls and women. For thousands of years we have convinced the males of their species to keep most of their females ignorant and to stifle the exercise of their intellectual gifts and creative talents. Of course, to our dismay, those blasted women still managed to live meaningful lives, to shape their societies, and to pass on their legacy to their children, but only with great difficulty and at great cost to themselves. But now they are free, free to add their individual voices to that appalling symphony of humanity. I’m afraid there’s no way to return to the good old days of oppression; however, if you will follow the steps our new misinformation campaign, you just may inspire a deeper form of oppression.

First, convince them that the New Testament, the source of all real notions of equality, is actually the chief instigator of sexism and misogyny. Then, having cut them off from the Enemy’s book, cause them to equate in their minds equality with sameness; indeed, make them redefine sexism to mean the belief that there are real, essential differences between the sexes (needless to say, they must not be allowed to read the book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*). Make them believe, as we have already fooled their academics into believing, that gender is merely a social construct, that the only reason men and women are different is that they give boys trucks to play with and girls dolls to play with. If you are careful, you can actually convert their women into misogynistic feminists. No, I am not making another oxymoron. In the name of a radical, infernal egalitarianism that insists on deconstructing all gender differences, the modern female will actually suppress within herself her Enemy-

given feminine qualities and lust after those very male qualities that she claims to despise. How fun it is to confuse and degrade them, and it is so easy. Such women, in the name of the egalitarian idol, will even leave their children to be raised by society, a great boon for us, since we have already quite thoroughly infiltrated the public sphere. And those poor, pathetic boys. Despite the fact that the majority of girls are still hungry for men with the courage and esteem to be true leaders, the boys (convinced, by us, that all girls are now feminists) are afraid to assert themselves in any way or take any leadership role. Even when they marry, they remain timid and indecisive, weakening their family structure and robbing them of that sexual game of active pursuit and passive surrender that the Enemy so loves but we so hate. Yes, their egalitarian principles will allow for some modicum of intimacy, but it will not be the kind of intimacy the Enemy intended for marriage.

But all this talk of sex and gender reminds me of a third quality of the modern teen that causes me to seethe with anger. For a long, lovely generation we convinced the youth of America that sex on demand was not only a rights but would actually free them to be fuller, richer people. Satan be praised, what wonderful days those were: they copulated like dogs in the street, their passion reduced to that of insects while their lusts were as ravenous as goats. With one fell swoop, we succeeded in doing what 300 years of Puritanism could never do: we completely divorced sex from intimacy. But today (curse them again), vast numbers of teens have bonded together in a program they call “True Love Waits.” They vow to remain celibate until marriage and even wear rings to display (proudly) their repulsive vow. And they really go through with it! It simply sickens me: those weak, slavish-minded fools resisting the full force of our sexualized media blitz.

Still, a slight ray of hope remains. We at the TCP, after long hours of struggle, have come up with one counter-offensive to this resurgence of celibacy. Let them remain celibate if that is their desire, but at all costs convince them that the reason for their celibacy is not that sex is something pure and holy to be reserved for the sanctuary of the marriage bed, but that sex is dirty and shameful and bestial. Whisper in the ear of every girl who wears a True Love Waits ring that she is too good to be touched by some dirty male, that it would degrade her to be thought of as physically desirable. As for the boys, let them justify their own fears of intimacy and vulnerability in the name of some vague internal crusade of purity. Yes, turn them into little prudes; make them ashamed of their bodies with all its disgusting fluids and hormonal secretions. If you can carry it off, make them hate their own sexual nature and identity. Teach them to build self-protective walls around themselves. And always, always, always, crush intimacy the moment it rears its ugly head. If you can transform celibacy from a positive virtue into a negative

shield for guilt, fear, and isolation, then your victory will be complete!

I notice by the clock that my time runs short, but the urgency of the topic impels me to mention briefly two further qualities of the modern teen. The first, one that (I regret to admit) took us completely by surprise, is the growing desire among teens to volunteer their time and energy and even to run off on short-term missions. Such a concern for others can only disrupt our plans and leave an opening for the work of the Enemy. Still, you can modify the damage slightly by coaxing the teen to evaluate his charitable service solely in terms of how it affected *him*. Let him concentrate only on how the experience has made *him* a fuller person, while ignoring completely any impact on the lives of those he purportedly went out to serve. Egocentrism is a wonderful tool for lessening the harmful impacts of the Enemy's virtues. As long as the giver of charity remains trapped within his own narrow plans and his own limited self-consciousness, he will never really learn to love his neighbor as himself for he will never be able to *see* his neighbor as himself.

Closely allied to this rise in volunteerism is a renewed desire on the part of young people to seek an authentic form of spirituality. Generally speaking, this is a bad thing. Better to confine all of them to a reductive naturalism than to risk opening their spirits to the voice of the Enemy. Still, because of our coordinated efforts to promote relativism in the schools and the media, it is not too difficult to convert their quest for the Enemy into a spiritual shopping spree. Allow them no spiritual discernment, no sense that there can be both a good form and a bad form of spirituality. Teach them that if words like angel or prayer or higher power are used, then it must be good. Better yet, help them to construct their own eclectic spirituality from bits and pieces of various religions and cultures. Divorce spirituality from scripture, from doctrine, from morality, from accountability.

There is much more that I could tell you, but I see by the frantic waving of Chairman Mukrake that the dawn of the new millennium lies but a few moments away. It may shock you to hear this, but it gladdens my heart that so many humans up above are frantically waiting for the end of the world to fall upon them. Though such apocalyptic expectations have tended in the past to keep people focused on the Enemy, we have put a new twist on the matter. Today, more and more young people use such expectations as a handy excuse for irresponsibility. Rather than make difficult life choices or build lasting ties and relationships, they wait around for the end in a state of torpor. Even better, they spend inordinate time looking for us under every stone while the Enemy gets virtually ignored. And besides, I do hope that none of you here this evening really believe all those lies about the Enemy's Son returning out of the sky and casting us all into the lake of fire. Propaganda, nothing but propaganda. Dominion is ours,

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my fellow tempters, and it is the teenagers who shall pave the way. Indeed, a little child *shall* lead them, but it shall be to a mountain of mediocrity: colorless, sexless, passionless, mindless. And from every hill top shall rise the Noise, louder and louder till every thought, every dream, every desire is finally and irrevocably crushed. To thee, O coming pandemonium, I raise my glass!